No. 16-6316 *** CAPITAL CASE ***
Title: Michael Damon Rippo, Petitioner
v.
Renee Baker, Warden
Docketed: October 5, 2016
Linked with 16A133
Lower Ct: Supreme Court of Nevada
Case Nos.: (53626)
Decision Date: February 25, 2016
Rehearing Denied: May 19, 2016

~~Date~~~	~~~~~~~Proceedings and Orders~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
Aug 4 2016	Application (16A133) to extend the time to file a petition for a writ of certiorari from August 17, 2016 to October 3, 2016, submitted to Justice Kennedy.
Aug 9 2016	Application (16A133) granted by Justice Kennedy extending the time to file until October 3, 2016.
Oct 3 2016	Petition for a writ of certiorari and motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis filed. (Response due November 4, 2016)
Nov 2 2016	Brief of respondent Renee Baker, Warden in opposition filed.
Nov 15 2016	Reply of petitioner Michael Damon Rippo filed. (Distributed)
Nov 16 2016	DISTRIBUTED for Conference of December 2, 2016.
Nov 23 2016	Record Requested.
Dec 6 2016	Record received from the Supreme Court of Nevada. The record is electronic.
Dec 8 2016	Record received from the Eighth Judicial District Court, Las Vegas, NV. The record is electronic and portions are SEALED.
Dec 15 2016	DISTRIBUTED for Conference of January 6, 2017.
Jan 9 2017	DISTRIBUTED for Conference of January 13, 2017.
Jan 17 2017	DISTRIBUTED for Conference of January 19, 2017.
Feb 6 2017	DISTRIBUTED for Conference of February 17, 2017.
Feb 21 2017	DISTRIBUTED for Conference of February 24, 2017.
Feb 27 2017	DISTRIBUTED for Conference of March 3, 2017.
Mar 6 2017	Motion to proceed in forma pauperis and petition for a writ of certiorari GRANTED. Judgment VACATED and case REMANDED. Opinion per curiam. (Detached Opinion)
Apr 7 2017	JUDGMENT ISSUED.
Apr 7 2017	MANDATE ISSUED.

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Party name: Renee Baker, Warden

16-6316

OCTOBER TERM, 2016

In the Supreme Court of the United States

MICHAEL DAMON RIPPO, Petitioner,

v.

TIMOTHY FILSON, Warden, Respondent.

On Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the Nevada Supreme Court

ORIGINAL

MOTION FOR LEAVE TO PROCEED *IN FORMA PAUPERIS*

Supreme Court, U.S.
FILED
OCT 0 3 2016
OFFICE OF THE CLERK

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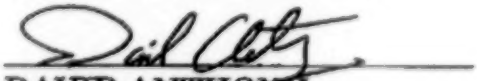
Pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 39.1, Petitioner Michael Damon Rippo requests leave to file the attached Petition for Writ of Certiorari without prepayment of costs and to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Rippo has been granted leave to do so in state court and federal court. In state court, counsel were appointed to represent Rippo at trial and on direct appeal. In 2008, the Federal Public Defender for the District of Nevada ("FPD") was appointed to represent Mr. Rippo during state post-conviction habeas proceedings. In the United States District Court, the FPD was appointed to represent Rippo in the district court. A copy of the order of the state court granting Rippo's motion for appointment of counsel is appended to this motion as Exhibit 1.

Dated this 3rd day of October 2016.

Respectfully submitted,



DAVID ANTHONY
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EXHIBIT 1

EXHIBIT 1

ORIGINAL

REQT
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FILED
Feb 13 12 49 PM '08
CLERK OF THE COURT

DISTRICT COURT

CLARK COUNTY, NEVADA

MICHAEL DAMON RIPPO, Petitioner, vs. E. K. McDANIEL, Warden, and CATHERIN CORTEZ-MASTO, Attorney General of the State of Nevada, Respondents.	Case No. C106784 Dept. No. XX Date of Hearing: _____ Time of Hearing: _____ (Death Penalty Case)

ORDER APPOINTING COUNSEL

Petitioner, Michael Rippo, in his Motion for Appointment of Counsel, requested his current counsel, the Office of the Federal Public Defender, represent him in this habeas corpus proceeding. On February 11, 2008, the matter came on for hearing. Good cause appearing,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the Office of the Federal Public Defender through David Anthony, Assistant Federal Public Defender, is appointed to represent Mr. Rippo during the

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RECEIVED
FEB 13 2008
CLERK OF THE COURT

pendency of this post-conviction habeas corpus proceeding.

DATED this 11th day of February 2008.

District Judge

Submitted by:
FRANNY A. FORSMAN
Federal Public Defender

DAVID ANTHONY
Assistant Federal Public Defender

C106784
O Appt Counsel.

No.

OCTOBER TERM, 2016

In the Supreme Court of the United States

MICHAEL DAMON RIPPO, Petitioner,

v.

TIMOTHY FILSON, Warden, Respondent.

On Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the Nevada Supreme Court

Petition for Writ of Certiorari

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

(Capital Case)

In this case, the trial judge was the target of a federal bribery investigation in which the prosecutor's office and state law enforcement participated. When defense counsel moved to recuse the judge at trial, the judge falsely represented that he did not know whether state law enforcement was involved in the investigation, and did not correct the prosecutor's false representations that the Clark County District Attorney's Office had no involvement in the federal investigation. The trial judge also failed to disclose that one of the State's witnesses in Rippo's case was a material part of the bribery investigation because the judge had fixed a case on behalf of the witness. Rippo was therefore deprived of a factual basis for his recusal motion throughout the prior state proceedings until the filing of the instant petition for writ of habeas corpus.

The question presented is:

1. Did the trial judge's failure to recuse himself from Rippo's capital trial violate the Due Process Clause?

LIST OF PARTIES

Petitioner Michael Damon Rippo is an inmate at Ely State Prison. Respondent Adam Paul Laxalt is the Attorney General of the State of Nevada. Respondent Timothy Filson is the warden of the Ely State Prison.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED i

LIST OF PARTIES ii

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI 1

OPINIONS BELOW 2

JURISDICTION 2

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS 3

STATEMENT OF THE CASE 3

A. Relevant Facts Adduced in the Trial Proceedings: The District Attorney's Office and State Law Enforcement Were Not Involved in the Federal Criminal Investigation of the Trial Judge. 3

B. Relevant Facts Proffered in the Instant Habeas Proceeding: The District Attorney's Office and State Law Enforcement Were Involved in the Federal Criminal Investigation of the Trial Judge. 8

C. The Federal Bribery Investigation Against the Trial Judge Involved Fixing Cases for Alleged Mafia Associates, Including Denny Mason 13

D. The State Courts Ignored the Import of the New Evidence by Holding that Rippo's Judicial Bias Claim Had Been Previously Raised and Rejected. 14

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION 16

A. Certiorari Review is Warranted Due to the Nevada Supreme Court's Egregious Failure to Apply this Court's Settled Law to a Capital Case Involving Extreme and Unusual Facts that Created an Unacceptable Risk of Judicial Bias. 16

B. The Nevada Supreme Court Failed to Properly Apply the Appearance of Impropriety Standard Because it Misapprehended the Nature of Rippo's Judicial Bias Claim As Limited to Compensatory Bias. 20

CONCLUSION 26

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Federal Cases

Bracy v. Gramley, 520 U.S. 899 (1997) ..... *passim*
Bracy v. Schomig, 286 F.3d 406 (7th Cir. 2002) 22
Brooks v. Dretke, 418 F.3d 430 (5th Cir. 2005) 23
Cartalino v. Washington, 122 F.3d 8 (7th Cir. 1997) 25
Collins v. Wellborn, 520 U.S. 1272 (1997) 19
Cone v. Bell, 556 U.S. 449 (2009) 17, 20
Flowers v. Mississippi, 136 S. Ct. 2157 (2016) 19
Foster v. Chatman, 136 S. Ct. 1737 (2016) 17, 19
In re Murchison, 349 U.S. 133 (1955) 25
Johnson v. Mississippi, 403 U.S. 212 (1971) 24
Liljeberg v. Health Servs. Acq. Corp., 486 U.S. 847 (1988) 19
Smith v. Cain, 132 S. Ct. 627 (2012) 17
Tumey v. Ohio, 273 U.S. 510 (1927) 23, 25
United States v. Lanier, 520 U.S. 259 (1997) 2
Wearry v. Cain, 136 S. Ct. 1002 (2016) 17
Wellons v. Hall, 558 U.S. 220 (2010)..... *passim*
Williams v. Pennsylvania, 136 S. Ct. 1899 (2016) ..... *passim*

Federal Statutes

28 U.S.C. § 1257(a) (2012) 2

State Cases

Crump v. Demosthenes, 934 P.2d 247 (Nev. 1997) 20
In Interest of McFall, 617 A.2d 707 (Pa. 1992) ..... *passim*
Rippo v. State, 146 P.3d 279 (Nev. 2006) 8
Rippo v. State, 368 P.3d 729 (Nev. 2016) ..... *passim*
Rippo v. State, 946 P.2d 1017 (Nev. 1997) 2, 7
Whitehead v. Nevada Comm'n on Judicial Discipline, 878 P.2d 913 (Nev. 1994) .. 24

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Petitioner Michael Damon Rippo requests this Court grant his petition for writ of certiorari and vacate his convictions and death sentences in a capital case involving extreme and unusual factual circumstances that required the recusal of the trial judge. At the time the trial judge adjudicated the case, he knew the State was involved in a federal criminal investigation alleging that the judge took bribes from litigants. Representatives of the State of Nevada, specifically, the Clark County District Attorney's Office and state law enforcement, were involved with the federal authorities in a sting operation which was intended to route a criminal case to the judge's department to see if the judge would accept a bribe. The District Attorney's Office was also conducting its own investigation to see if the judge had accepted bribes in any other criminal cases. One of the individuals who the judge was accused of fixing cases for was Denny Mason, a witness for the state in the instant case and the victim of the stolen credit card offense for which Rippo was convicted. Rippo requests that this Court grant his petition for writ of certiorari because it is clear that the judge's presence in the case carried an unacceptable risk of bias and recusal was constitutionally mandated.

"The facts of this case are, happily, not the stuff of typical judicial-disqualification disputes." *Bracy v. Gramley*, 520 U.S. 899 (1997). Rippo has not been able to find any case where a sitting trial judge was being criminally investigated by one of the parties before him in a case.[1] The absence of direct

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[1] The circumstances before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in *In Interest of McFall*, 617 A.2d 707 (Pa. 1992), are analogous in that a judge was caught accepting a gift from a litigant and subsequently became an informant from the FBI and the judge entered into a cooperation agreement stating that the federal authorities would make the judge's cooperation known to other entities, including, presumably, the state prosecutor's office. *Id.* at 713. In Rippo's case, the judge knew that the prosecutor's office was involved in the federal investigation at the time he presided over Rippo's case.

authority on this point is precisely because no one would consider such a thing permissible: "a general constitutional rule already identified in the decisional law may apply with obvious clarity to the specific conduct in question, even though 'the very action in question has [not] previously been held unlawful.'" *United States v. Lanier*, 520 U.S. 259, 271 (1997) (citation omitted). As this Court has noted, "[t]he easiest cases don't even arise." *Id.* (citation and internal quotations omitted). This is one of those easy cases: a trial judge cannot maintain a constitutional level of impartiality in a case in which he is being criminally investigated by one of the parties and where one of the state's witnesses was involved in one of the cases that was alleged to have been fixed by the judge.

Rippo requests that this Court grant his petition for writ of certiorari to correct this fundamental miscarriage of justice.

OPINIONS BELOW

The decision of the Nevada Supreme Court, affirming the denial of Rippo's second state post-conviction petition for writ of habeas corpus is published and is found at *Rippo v. State* 368 P.3d 729 (Nev. 2016). App.001-66. The Nevada Supreme Court's order denying the petition for rehearing is unreported and appears at App. 091-94. The Nevada Supreme Court's 1997 opinion affirming the judgment of conviction is reported at *Rippo v. State*, 946 P.2d 1017 (Nev. 1997). App. 067-90.

JURISDICTION

The Nevada Supreme Court's order of affirmance was issued on February 25, 2016, and a timely petition for rehearing was denied on May 19, 2016. On August 9, 2016, Justice Kennedy extended the time to file a petition for writ of certiorari until and including October 3, 2016. This Court has statutory jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1257(a).

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution provides, in pertinent part:

> No state shall . . . deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Petitioner Michael Damon Rippo was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and robbery for the deaths of Denise Lizzi and Lauri Jacobson. The state's pathologist testified that Lizzi's cause of death was consistent with manual and ligature strangulation and that Jacobson's death was the result of asphyxiation due to manual strangulation. Rippo was also convicted of unauthorized use of a credit card taken from the crime scene belonging to Denny Mason, Lizzi's boyfriend. Rippo was sentenced to death by a jury for both murders. On May 17, 1996, judgment of conviction was entered, sentencing Rippo to 15 years for the robbery conviction and 10 years (to run consecutively) for the credit card offense.

A. Relevant Facts Adduced in the Trial Proceedings: The District Attorney's Office and State Law Enforcement Were Not Involved in the Federal Criminal Investigation of the Trial Judge.

During the trial, defense counsel moved to recuse the trial court, the Honorable Gerard Bongiovanni, on the grounds that the judge was the subject of a federal criminal investigation alleging that the judge took bribes from litigants in the cases before him. During argument on the motion, the parties discussed whether the prosecutor's office and state law enforcement were involved in the criminal investigation. In response, the prosecutor falsely represented that the Clark County District Attorney's Office was not involved in any investigation of the judge, and the trial judge falsely represented that he was unaware whether state law enforcement were involved in the investigation. The trial judge did not disclose any information

regarding any relationship he may have had with Denny Mason, the victim of the stolen credit card offense and a witness for the state.

On February 5, 1996, based on information recently published in the local newspaper, trial counsel made a motion to disqualify the trial court on the grounds that the judge faced an imminent indictment in federal court, and that "the State is – obviously has to cooperate with the feds in reviewing cases of alleged bias, that there may be pressure placed on the Court to show favor to the State." App. 150-151; App. 164-165. When trial counsel stated that they had "no idea what's going on in your case other than the fact the . . .," the trial court interrupted and said "Neither do I." *Id.* at 151-152. The court represented, "I know as much as you do, what the newspaper writes." *Id.* at 152.

The prosecutor stated that he had discussed the matter with the Clark County District Attorney Stewart Bell and Chief Deputy District Attorney Charles Thompson and asked them: "Do you know what's going on? And they said not really . . . ." *Id.* at 153. He explained that Bell disclosed that the extent of his knowledge about the case was limited to "when the search warrant occurred, that the feds called him and – just as a sort of courtesy call . . . ." *Id.* The prosecutor represented that Bell specifically instructed the federal authorities not to tell him anything about the case because of his role as a District Attorney before a sitting judge. *See id.*

The prosecutor represented that the Clark County District Attorney's Office had nothing to do with the federal investigation of the trial judge:

> And so, I think the major thing that I want to point out, it is two different governmental entities. The State of Nevada, in terms of the District Attorney's Office at least, and through Stu [the District Attorney], I can speak for our office, we have nothing to do with any sort of – what we're reading about in the newspapers, because that's all I know, is the same thing that you read.

> We don't have any agreements with [the federal authorities], any working arrangements with them. We don't have anything with them and don't anticipate having any.
>
> And so, I can't see that the State of Nevada, in here before you now, would have any emphasis one way or the other on any rulings or decisions that you might make. In fact, we want to make it abundantly clear that there is nothing like that going on. And we just – we want to say what we believe is true anyway, which is that you are not going to take sides.

App. 154. The prosecutor further explained, "I can say as an officer of the Court, we are not – and that is through Stu Bell, and if you want further words out of him, he will be happy to give them – but we just don't think – we just don't' think that there is anything to this motion. . . ." App. 155. The prosecutor again represented, "I learned from my boss this morning, Stu Bell, that he, nor any other person in our office, to his knowledge, has had contact." App. 157.

The trial judge represented that he was unaware whether the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department ("Metro") was involved in the federal investigation:

> The Court: Well, would there be any difference if Metro conducted an investigation? I don't know. I heard a rumor to that effect, but I don't know if it's true.
>
> Mr. Wolfson: It's very common for Metro's intelligence –
>
> The Court: I think I read something in the paper to that effect in one of those articles.
>
> Mr. Wolfson: It's very common for Metro's intelligence units to work with federal law enforcement agencies in a joint effort. I don't know whether they are doing that in this case or not.
>
> The Court: I don't know either.

App. 157. The trial court denied the defense's motion for recusal. *See id.*

After his conviction, Rippo filed a motion for new trial which asserted that the trial judge failed to disclose his business relationship with Denny Mason's business partner, Ben Spano, who was purportedly a member of the La Cosa Nostra in Buffalo, New York. App. 171-176. Rippo argued that disclosure of that information, along with the fact of the federal criminal investigation, should have required the recusal of the trial court. App. 171-176. According to the motion,

> If the defense had known about the connection between the judge, Denny Mason, and organized crime, we would have asked for a recusal and considered calling the judge as a witness. Also, if the judge had disclosed this mob connection, we could have had additional information to question Mr. Mason.

App. 173-174.

In its opposition to the motion for new trial, the state argued that Rippo's motion should be denied based on the trial judge's representations on the record at trial. App. 177-182. Specifically, the state referred to the judge's representations "stating emphatically that the Rippo case and the pending federal investigation against the court were completely unrelated." App. 178. The state argued that Rippo's motion "has not presented one iota of evidence which contradicts the previous declarations of Judge Bongiovanni made on the record in his denial of the motion for recusal." App. 179. The Honorable James Brennan, who was substituted for Judge Bongiovanni after his indictment, heard arguments on Rippo's motion. The trial court denied Rippo's motion as lacking any factual support. App. 186.

On direct appeal, Rippo raised a claim of judicial bias and argued that the trial court should have recused itself. He also argued that the trial court erred in denying his motion for an evidentiary hearing to determine "whether there was any involvement by the District Attorney's Office in the investigation and indictment that should have been revealed on the record before Judge Bongiovanni was allowed to

proceed with the capital trial." App. 267. Rippo also alleged that the District Attorney's Office was a necessary participant in a sting operation against the judge which "involved a manipulation of the random assignment of cases so that particular cases would track to his department. If the office of the District Attorney were involved in any aspect of this situation then the representations put on the record during trial were inaccurate." App. 285. Appeal counsel did not include any citation to the record to support his assertions, presumably because recent news reports only vaguely hinted at the time the Clark County District Attorney's Office might be involved in the sting operation.

In its answering brief, the state argued that the District Attorney's Office had no involvement in the investigation of the trial court and that judge court would not have had any reason to be concerned about the prosecutor's office:

> the State admittedly had nothing to do with the federal probe. [citation] The State was not in a position to do anything to Judge Bongiovanni. The judge had no reason to worry about 'what the State was going to do to him. Completely different entities were involved.'

App. 277. The state reiterated the representations of the prosecutor at trial that the District Attorney's only involvement in the case against the judge was limited to notice after the fact regarding the execution of the search warrant on his home. *Id.*

The Nevada Supreme Court affirmed the convictions, denying both the recusal motion and the motion for new trial on the grounds that there was no factual support for any of Rippo's assertions. *Rippo v. State*, 946 P.2d 1017, 1023-24 (Nev. 1997). The court also denied Rippo's request for a remand for an evidentiary hearing on his allegations of judicial bias. App. 067-90.

B. Relevant Facts Proffered in the Instant Habeas Proceeding: The District Attorney's Office and State Law Enforcement Were Involved in the Federal Criminal Investigation of the Trial Judge.

The instant proceeding arises from the filing of Rippo's second state post-conviction petition.[2] In this proceeding, Rippo proffered overwhelming evidence that the Clark County District Attorney's Office and state law enforcement were involved in the federal criminal investigation, and that the office was also conducting an investigation of the judge's cases to determine whether he had taken bribes from litigants.

Contrary to the state's representations at trial, the Clark County District Attorney's Office and the Chief Judge of the Eighth Judicial District Court were essential participants in the federal sting operation to bait Judge Bongiovanni into taking bribes from the litigants before him. Specifically, a "supervising attorney" in the Clark County District Attorney's Office obtained a phony indictment in state court against Terry Salem, a government informant, and worked with the Chief Judge of the court to manipulate the random assignment system to send Salem's case to Judge Bongiovanni's department to see if the judge would accept a bribe from Salem. In the United States Attorney's trial memorandum in Bongiovanni's case, it expressly noted, "With the assistance of the District Attorney's office, and as part of the undercover operation, Salem was indicted by a state grand jury on December 15, 1994 for theft charges relating to the California Federal Bank fraud, and the case was assigned to Bongiovanni." App. 397.

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[2] Rippo filed a timely first state post-conviction petition that was denied by the habeas court, and the denial was affirmed by the Nevada Supreme Court in a sharply divided 4-3 decision relating to the validity of the death sentences. *Rippo v. State*, 146 P.3d 279 (Nev. 2006). That proceeding does not raise any issues that are relevant to Rippo's claim of judicial bias.

A defense motion filed by Bongiovanni's attorneys specifically sought dismissal of the indictment on the ground that the government's sting operation constituted outrageous government conduct. App. 232-260. In that motion, the defense cited to the affidavit of FBI case agent Jerry Hanford wherein Agent Hanford represented that "a supervisory attorney with the Clark County District Attorney's Office has agreed to present a state Grand Jury with an Indictment charging SALEM with forgery and obtaining money under false pretenses in regard to the fraud committed against California Federal Bank. Under the state system, the District Attorney's Office must send the target a notice of his target status and invite him to appear before the Grand Jury." App. 236-237. Agent Hanford further explained that the same supervising attorney was necessary to manipulate the random assignment process to ensure the case was sent to Judge Bongiovanni's department: "In any event, the deputy district attorney who is cooperating in this investigation said that he can ensure that the case is assigned to Bongiovanni if Flangas and/or Bongiovanni do not do it themselves, or the case is not randomly assigned to him, without Bongiovanni being alerted to that fact." App. 237.

At Bongiovanni's criminal trials, Terry Salem, Metro Detective John Nicholson, and Special Agent Hanford all testified about the roles of the Clark County District Attorney's Office and state law enforcement in the investigation of Bongiovanni. Salem testified that he became a government informant and it was his understanding that a phony indictment would be presented against him in state court and routed to Bongiovanni's department. App. 436-448, App. 453-454, 461, App. 484-488. Metro police detective John Nicholson testified that he was involved in every aspect of the criminal investigation of Judge Bongiovanni. Nicholson testified that he was involved in the surveillance operation wherein Terry Salem handed the bribe money to Paul Dottore – the alleged intermediary between Salem and Bongiovanni –

also became a government witness against Bongiovanni at his criminal trials. App. 458-459. Nicholson was present during all witness interviews. App. 479. Nicholson testified that he and Mike Abbot from the Nevada Division of Investigation ("NDI") were personally involved in the execution of a search warrant on Bongiovanni's property in October of 1995. App. 461-476. Nicholson was the first person to walk into Bongiovanni's residence wearing his yellow police jacket, clearly identifying him as a Metro police officer. App. 480, 517-518. Also, Nicholson was the first person to make contact with Bongiovanni in his residence and was the person who questioned him about the bribe money. App. 476, 478, 513. Finally, Nicholson was present when the authorities pulled over Paul Dottore after he left Bongiovanni's home. App. 464-466. Special Agent Hanford corroborated all of Detective Nicholson's testimony regarding state law enforcement's involvement in the investigation of Judge Bongiovanni. App. 484, App. 495-496, 503.

When testifying in his defense, Bongiovanni admitted that he had actual knowledge at the time of the search warrant's execution that Metro was involved in the federal investigation. Bongiovanni testified that he saw Nicholson as the first person entering his home wearing a Metro jacket. App. 513 ("the first person I saw was Detective Nicholson, and like they stated they were all in their FBI garbs and Metro had his raincoat on with the letters, and as I turned the corner there was Nicholson, he says I have a warrant here."). App. 513. At his second trial, Bongiovanni testified that Detective Nicholson was wearing a jacket that "had 'Metro' or 'Las Vegas Police Department'" inscribed on it. App. 518. Bongiovanni testified, "Nicholson was the one that was very, very loud. I'm not saying it was like a drug bust, but he was very loud and he put the fear of God in my kids, I'll tell you." App. 527, 530 ("Nicholson was right in my ear, I mean – and he could talk loud and it seemed like screaming to me, shouting."), App. 531 ("all's I could hear was Nicholson

shouting in my ear."). Bongiovanni also testified that Nicholson was the officer who obtained the marked bribe money from his back pants pocket. *See* App. 531-542. Therefore, Bongiovanni's representations at Rippo's trial that he did not know whether Metro was involved in the investigation were false.

Bongiovanni's actions directly before Mr. Rippo's trial demonstrate that he was also aware of the involvement of the Clark County District Attorney's Office in the federal investigation. After the execution of the search warrant on October 17, 1995, Bongiovanni hired attorney Tom Pitaro, who interviewed Paul Dottore, the government informant and alleged intermediary between Salem and Bongiovanni, and obtained information about the bribery investigation. App. 354. Less than a month later, on November 7, 1995, Judge Bongiovanni disqualified himself from adjudicating Salem's criminal case to avoid the appearance of impropriety and implied bias. App. 133. Contained within the district court case file for Salem was an indictment that was sought by Ulrich Smith, a deputy district attorney with the Clark County District Attorney's Office. App. 135-141. The indictment listed the lead witness against Salem as Detective John Nicholson from Metro Intelligence. *See id.* Also contained within the district court file was the grand jury transcript showing that the District Attorney's Office presented the testimony of Detective Nicholson as the lead witness against Salem. On January 10, 1996, the District Attorney's Office dismissed the state criminal case against Salem. App. 133-134. This sequence of events demonstrates that Judge Bongiovanni did know about the Clark County District Attorney's role in the sting operation directly before Rippo's trial, beginning on January 30, 1996.

Rippo also presented evidence that the Clark County District Attorney's Office was conducting its own investigation of Judge Bongiovanni's cases at the time of Mr. Rippo's trial. At the time, media reports depicted Bongiovanni as a "liberal" who was

soft on criminals. App. 168-170. According to the article, "[t]he district attorney's office is reviewing its cases before Bongiovanni to determine if the judge's alleged biases affected the prosecution." *Id.* The same article stated that the District Attorney's Office considered Bongiovanni to be a "liberal" when it came to judging: "'We probably didn't enjoy trying cases in his department as much as we did others,' said Deputy District Attorney Chuck Thompson . . . . 'He wasn't our first choice to try a close case in front of.'" *Id.* Another article stated, "Clark County District Attorney J. Charles Thompson said Thursday the office is reviewing the case of Kevin Brown, the 30-year-old son of Las Vegas U.S. Marshal Service chief Herb Brown." App. 168. No information regarding the District Attorney's internal investigation of Bongiovanni has ever been disclosed.

The sequence of events demonstrates that the trial court would have had reason to be concerned about the state's involvement in the federal criminal investigation at the time he presided over Rippo's capital trial. Bongiovanni became aware of the nature of the federal investigation on October 17, 1995, when the search warrant was executed on his home. Bongiovanni's attorney immediately began investigating the case and obtained inside information that was not known to the general public about the investigation. App. 352, App. 327-328. And then Bongiovanni apparently acted on that inside information by disqualifying himself from Salem's case on November 7, 1995. Rippo alleges on information and belief that the federal grand jury convened in December of 1995. According to newspaper accounts, Bongiovanni had even been offered a guilty plea by the federal authorities directly before Rippo's trial. Jeff German, *Bongiovanni Braces for Tough Fight Over Corruption Charges*, Las Vegas Sun, April 18, 1996, at 1A. In addition, the District Attorney's Office, at the direction of J. Charles Thompson, the same person consulted by the prosecutor who said the District Attorney's Office knew nothing about the

federal investigation, was conducting an investigation of criminal cases that had come before Bongiovanni.

C. The Federal Bribery Investigation Against the Trial Judge Involved Fixing Cases for Alleged Mafia Associates, Including Denny Mason

Rippo also proffered evidence in the instant habeas proceeding showing that there was a direct relationship between the federal criminal investigation of the trial judge and the state's victim witness, Denny Mason. Mason testified at trial that he was the owner of the credit card and motor vehicle that were taken from the victim, Denise Lizzi, and purportedly used by Rippo. Rippo proffered evidence showing that the bribery allegations against the judge included wiretap evidence that alleged mafia figures contacted the court and sought and obtained benefits in a case involving Denny Mason as the defendant.

A material portion of the federal criminal allegations against Bongiovanni included the fact that the trial judge performed favors for Ben Spano, an alleged member of the mafia, in the form of own recognizance releases and fixing traffic tickets for Spano and his associates, including Denny Mason.[1] Specifically, the

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[1]During Agent Hanford's testimony at Judge Bongiovanni's trial, the government introduced Exhibit 113, which was a recording of Ben Spano's phone call to Judge Bongiovanni's home. App. 492. The government also introduced Exhibit 114, which comprised seven recorded phone conversations relating to Bongiovanni's purported favors for Spano. App. 492-493. Bongiovanni testified that the own-recognizance release that he obtained for Spano's son was legitimate because he believed that Spano would make his court appearances. App. 509. On cross-examination, Bongiovanni admitted that he knew Spano: "Q He's a friend like Ben Spano was a friend, right? A – but we weren't – no, no. I knew Ben Spano a little better than Mr. O'Neill . . . .").

Spano called Bongiovanni on December 29, 1994, at his home and this phone call was intercepted by the FBI. App. 199. Bongiovanni's secretary, Diane Woofter, called Spano on February 13, 1995, and this phone call was also intercepted by the FBI. App. 202. Bongiovanni's defense counsel filed a motion mentioning the allegations from Agent Hanford's affidavit that Spano was a member of the Buffalo La Cosa Nostra, which operated companies in Las Vegas. App. 227.

indictment against Bongiovanni alleged that he improperly granted benefits to Spano in criminal cases. App. 307-315. Ben Spano was also specifically referenced in the United States Attorney's trial memorandum. App. 396. One of the individuals for whom Spano obtained benefits from Bongiovanni was Denny Mason. Specifically, an authorization for a wiretap order, dated October 11, 1995, included the memorialization of a phone call from Spano to Judge Bongiovanni's chambers. App. 396-397. In the conversation, "Ben Spano (Buffalo LCN ["La Cosa Nostra"] associate called Bongiovanni re[garding] his brother in Henderson jail; guy OR'd; also talked to Woofter re[garding] Denny Mason's ticket)." *Id.* Rippo further alleged on information and belief that Spano personally introduced Mason to Bongiovanni at a social event.

At Rippo's trial, Bongiovanni falsely represented that there was no connection between the federal investigation and the instant case. App. 164.

D. The State Courts Ignored the Import of the New Evidence by Holding that Rippo's Judicial Bias Claim Had Been Previously Raised and Rejected.

After discovering the evidence above pertaining to Bongiovanni's criminal case, Rippo filed the instant successive state petition on Janury 25, 2008. The State moved to dismiss the petition, and Rippo opposed the motion and sought formal discovery and an evidentiary hearing on his claim of judicial bias. During argument on the State's motion, counsel for the State acknowledged the overwhelming evidence proffered by Rippo that the State was involved in the sting operation against the judge. Counsel for the State acknowledged that the district attorney's office "are the only ones that can file a case [against Salem, the government informant], so I can see how this might have come about." App. 555. At the same time, the representative for the State made it clear that he did not make any attempt to determine what facts

were known to his office regarding its role in the investigation and prosecution of the judge at the time of Rippo's trial:

> I did not intend to admit anything in any brief that I filed in this case. I don't know what happened. I wasn't there. I wasn't part of the proceeding. I'm simply looking at the documents the Federal Public Defender has provided which indicates there was a conversation with a deputy of our office and that there – that's the only place I'm getting that is from their own documents. So I don't intend to say that we were involved. I simply don't know.

App. 555.

The state habeas court granted the State's motion to dismiss and denied Rippo's motions for discovery and an evidentiary hearing. In its findings of fact and conclusions of law that were drafted by the State, the court held that Rippo's claim was procedurally defaulted because defense counsel purportedly knew at the time of trial that the State was involved in the criminal investigation of the trial judge:

> The record shows that more than a decade ago, Rippo's trial counsel knew and alleged that the State was involved in the Federal sting operation by indicting Terry Salem and manipulating the random assignment of the case and also that Bongiovanni failed to disclose a prior relationship with witness Denny Mason who was the business partner of reputed Buffalo mob associate Ben Spano.

App. 563.[3] As explained above, the record before the state court on direct appeal showed that the District Attorney's Office and state law enforcement were not involved in the investigation of the trial judge, and there was no evidence connecting state victim witness Denny Mason to the criminal investigation.

The Nevada Supreme Court affirmed the habeas court's denial of Rippo's petition, albeit for different reasons. The court characterized Rippo's claim of judicial bias as being predicated on the fact that the trial judge

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[3] Rippo filed a formal objection to this proposed finding on the ground that it was factually baseless.

> (1) was the subject of a federal investigation at the time of trial, (2) knew that the Clark County District Attorney's Office and/or the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (Metro) were involved in the investigation but failed to disclose that fact, and (3) was acquainted with a trial witness (Denny Mason) but failed to disclose that fact because it would have incriminated the judge in the federal investigation.

Rippo, 368 P.3d at 743. App. 29. The court refused to reconsider its decision as to the first and third allegations because there "are no substantially different facts alleged now that would warrant an exception to the law-of-the-case doctrine with respect to our prior decision regarding these allegations." *Id.* at 743-44. App. 029-30.

As to the second allegation, the Nevada Supreme Court noted that Rippo proffered evidence showing that "as part of the sting operation, an unnamed chief or deputy district attorney worked with federal authorities to bring a fictitious case before the trial judge and that the judge saw a person wearing a Metro jacket when FBI agents executed a search warrant at his home." *Rippo*, 368 P.3d at 744. App. 030-31. However, the court rejected Rippo's argument because it was "not entirely clear that this new information established that the State was engaged in its own investigation of the trial judge or that there was a joint state/federal investigation as opposed to a federal investigation in which some state actors provided assistance to the federal authorities." *Id.* Even if there was, the court held that "the facts remain insufficient to establish judicial bias." *Id.*

The Nevada Supreme Court denied Rippo's petition for rehearing on May 19, 2016. App. 91-93. This petition for writ of certiorari follows.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION

A. Certiorari Review is Warranted Due to the Nevada Supreme Court's Egregious Failure to Apply this Court's Settled Law to a Capital Case Involving Extreme and Unusual Facts that Created an Unacceptable Risk of Judicial Bias.

This Court will review a capital habeas case arising from a state court judgment when the "lower courts have egregiously misapplied settled law." *Wearry v. Cain*, 136 S. Ct. 1002, 1007 (2016) (citing cases). This Court has also reviewed the decisions of state habeas courts where there are extreme and unusual facts that were not previously available to the defendant at trial as a result of state action. *See id.* at 1007-08.[4] Here, the trial judge was being criminally investigated by one of the parties and the investigation concerned a case that the judge had fixed for one of the witnesses at Rippo's trial. The Nevada Supreme Court's failure to apply the appearance of impropriety standard to the facts of this case constitutes an egregious misapplication of this Court's judicial bias jurisprudence.

Moreover, this Court has intervened in cases presenting extreme and unusual facts when the state courts failed to consider the import of new material evidence that fundamentally altered the nature of a constitutional claim previously raised and rejected by the state court. *E.g.*, *Foster v. Chatman*, 136 S. Ct. 1737, 1745-46 (2016).[5] In such circumstances, a state court's ruling preventing re-litigation of a claim risks blinding the court to the consideration of new material facts, which require a different outcome. *Cf. Wellons v. Hall*, 558 U.S. 220, 222 (2010) (*per curiam*) ("perfunctory consideration" by court of appeals "may well have turned on the District Court's

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[4] *E.g.*, *Foster v. Chatman*, 136 S. Ct. 1737, 1755 (2016) (noting state's strenuous objection "[t]hroughout all stages of this litigation" that it did not exercise peremptory challenges in a discriminatory manner, until petitioner obtained discovery in habeas proceedings "of the prosecution's file" which "belie[d] the State's claim"); *Smith v. Cain*, 132 S. Ct. 627, 629-30 (2012) (petitioner "obtained files from the police investigation in his case" during state post-conviction proceedings that showed that the state failed to disclose material impeachment information at trial).

[5] *See, e.g.*, *Cone v. Bell*, 556 U.S. 449, 459-61 (2009) (state courts conflated "the state-law disclosure claim Cone had raised on direct appeal with his newly filed *Brady* claim"); *Wellons v. Hall*, 558 U.S. 220, 221 (2010) (*per curiam*) (noting state court's finding that judicial bias claim re-raised in state habeas proceedings was denied as *res judicata*).

finding of a procedural bar"). The decision by the Nevada Supreme Court in Rippo's case warrants this Court's intervention as the state court's law-of-the-case ruling – which is a decision on the merits for the purposes of federal review – so far departed from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings as to warrant this Court's plenary consideration. *Cf.* SCR 10.

In the alternative, Rippo requests that this Court grant his petition, vacate the decision of the Nevada Supreme Court, and remand the case for further proceedings in light of this Court's recent decision in *Williams v. Pennsylvania*, 136 S. Ct. 1899 (2016). In *Williams*, this Court granted certiorari from a state court judgment in a habeas case where a state supreme court justice had previously participated in the decision to seek the death penalty in the petitioner's case as the District Attorney approximately thirty years earlier. *Id.* at 1905-09. The personal involvement of the state supreme court justice in authorizing the death penalty is analogous to (although not perhaps as troublesome as) the personal involvement of the trial judge in Rippo's case where the trial court was being investigated by the state in connection with the federal bribery investigation, and where the judge's disclosure of his relationship with Denny Mason would have incriminated him in the federal investigation. In both cases "there is an unconstitutional 'potential for bias.'" *Williams*, 136 S. Ct. at 1905 (citation omitted). As in *Williams*, the very evidence discounted by the Nevada Supreme Court in Rippo's case is the same evidence showing that the trial judge had an improper personal interest in the case that required the court's recusal. Rippo accordingly meets the standard set forth by this Court for a GVR in light of *Williams*: there is "a reasonable probability that the decision below rests upon a premise that the lower court would reject if given the opportunity for further consideration, and [ ] it appears that such a redetermination may determine the ultimate outcome of the matter." *Wellons v. Hall*, 558 U.S. at 225 (citation omitted). *Cf., e.g., Flowers v.*

Mississippi, 136 S. Ct. 2157 (2016) (granting GVR on *Batson* claims in light of *Foster v. Chatman*, 136 S. Ct. 1737 (2016)).

A GVR in light of *Williams* is also appropriate given the extreme and unusual facts of Rippo's case for which he has never received an opportunity for factual development. *Cf., e.g., Collins v. Wellborn*, 520 U.S. 1272 (1997) (granting GVR in light of *Bracy v. Gramley*, 520 U.S. 899 (1997)). Rippo faces the same "procedural morass" that confronted the petitioner in *Wellons*. The trial court did not disclose the disqualifying facts at the time of trial, and, in fact, entirely misrepresented them, as did the prosecution. *See Wellons*, 558 U.S. at 221; *cf. Liljeberg v. Health Serv. Acquisition Corp.*, 486 U.S. 847, 868 (1988) ("by his silence, [the trial court] deprived respondent of a basis for making a timely motion for new trial and also deprived it of an issue on appeal."). Rippo raised his judicial bias claim on direct appeal, but he was constrained by the non-existent record. When he re-raised his claim in the instant habeas proceeding with new evidence that completely undermined the factual basis for the Nevada Supreme Court's decision on direct appeal, his claim was rejected on the ground that it had been previously decided, without any consideration of whether the totality of the circumstances warranted an evidentiary hearing, in light of the false representations made at trial by the judge and the prosecution. A GVR is appropriate here, just as it was in *Wellons*, given the "unusual facts of the case" and the "petitioner's allegations and the unusual facts raise a serious question about the fairness of a capital trial." *Id.*

The Nevada Supreme Court's law-of-the-case ruling is reviewable by this Court as it was a decision on the merits of Rippo's judicial bias claim. This Court recently reiterated that a state court's finding of *res judicata* is not independent of federal law when the circumstances show that the claim was decided on the merits. *Foster v. Chatman*, 136 S. Ct. 1737, 1745-47 & n.4 (2016) (court will review issue either

"resting primarily on" or "influenced by" federal law) (citations omitted). "When a state court refuses to readjudicate a claim on the ground that it has been previously determined, the court's decision does not indicate that the claim has been procedurally defaulted." *Cone v. Bell*, 556 U.S. 449, 467 (2009). "To the contrary, it provides strong evidence that the claim has already been given full consideration by the state courts and thus is *ripe* for adjudication." *Id.* (emphasis in original). There is nothing in the Nevada Supreme Court's decision in Rippo's case to show that it was anything other than a decision on the merits of his judicial bias claim.[6] This Court accordingly has jurisdiction to decide the legal issue in this case.

B. The Nevada Supreme Court Failed to Properly Apply the Appearance of Impropriety Standard Because it Misapprehended the Nature of Rippo's Judicial Bias Claim As Limited to Compensatory Bias.

Rippo does not argue that the mere fact that a state court judge knows that he or she is the subject of a federal criminal investigation is sufficient by itself to require recusal under the Due Process Clause. Instead, he argues that the totality of the circumstances in his case, where the judge was being criminally investigated by one of the parties and where the investigation concerned the judge's conduct of fixing cases for one of the state's witnesses, required the judge's recusal. The instant case is one of those rare ones where the extreme and unusual facts present a constitutionally-intolerable risk of bias, and where recusal is required to address the resulting appearance of impropriety.

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[6] In Nevada, a capital habeas petitioner can overcome the state procedural default bars by showing that first state post-conviction counsel performed ineffectively. *See, e.g., Crump v. Warden*, 934 P.2d 247, 253-54 (Nev. 1997). The Nevada Supreme Court's finding that Rippo did not suffer prejudice from first state post-conviction counsel's performance was based on its antecedent holding that the judicial bias claim was without merit. *Rippo v. State*, 368 P.3d 743-45 (Nev. 2016); App. 030-32.

The Nevada Supreme Court's failure to consider the totality of the circumstances in this case affected its characterization of the species of judicial bias in Rippo's case. The state court was required to "first identify the 'essential elements' of [the bias] claim," *Bracy*, 520 U.S. at 904 (citation omitted), before it was in the position to apply the appropriate legal standard. According to the Nevada Supreme Court:

> Rippo's judicial-bias claim is not that the trial judge was biased against him specifically but more that the investigation and indictment created a 'compensatory camouflaging bias' – that the trial judge would be biased against criminal defendants at the time to curry favor with the agencies investigating him and prove that he was not soft on criminal defendants. *Bracy v. Gramley*, 520 U.S. 899 [ ] (1997) (describing similar claim of judicial bias).

Rippo, 368 P.3d at 744; App. 31. While the facts of Rippo's case share many similarities with *Bracy*, it is not necessarily because his case presents an issue of compensatory bias. In *Bracy*, the trial judge took a bribe in a case directly before he sat as the judge at the defendant's trial, another bribe directly after the trial, so the theory of compensatory bias was that the judge may have "compensated" for his bribe-taking by being partial against a defendant who did not bribe him. *Bracy*, 520 U.S. at 905. In those unique circumstances, this Court held that formal discovery was appropriate to determine whether the judge's act of appointing his former law partner and rushing the case to trial showed that the judge was biased in the defendant's case on a theory of compensatory bias. *Id.* at 906.

Rippo's case is somewhat similar to *Bracy* in that the trial judge here was accused of fixing cases for mafia figures and Rippo did not bribe him. However, the crux of Rippo's bias claim is that the trial judge found out just before the start of the trial that the Clark County District Attorney's Office and state law enforcement were

involved in the federal criminal investigation of him.[7] The judge knew that the office was involved in the sting operation and may reasonably have suspected that the state had even more involvement in the investigation. The judge may have also known that the District Attorney's Office was reviewing the cases that had previously come before the court to determine whether the judge had taken bribes from any other criminal defendants, as was reported in the news directly after Rippo's trial. The judge likely suspected as much when he recused himself from the government informant's (Terry Salem's) criminal case directly before Rippo's trial. The factual circumstances of a judge being criminally investigated by one of the parties is completely different here from the compensatory bias theory in *Bracy*, and the distinction requires a different legal analysis. *See Bracy*, 520 U.S. at 905 (noting that theory of compensatory bias can be "speculative" because "it might be equally likely that a judge who was 'on the take' in *some* criminal cases would be careful to at least appear favorable to *all* criminal defendants, so as to avoid apparently wild and unexplainable swings in decisions and judicial philosophy") (emphasis in original).[8]

A judge cannot maintain a constitutional level of impartiality when he or she is being criminally investigated by one of the parties to a case. This "Court's

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[7] The Nevada Supreme Court mentioned in a footnote that "the trial judge was not indicted until after Rippo's trial." *Rippo*, 368 P.3d at 744 n.19, App.031. However, this factual distinction does not change the temptation that would have existed for the average jurist "not to hold the balance nice, clear, and true" between the state and the accused. This finding also ignores Rippo's assertion that the judge had been offered a guilty plea directly before Rippo's trial started, which means that the court knew that an indictment against him was imminent.

[8] *See Bracy v. Schomig*, 286 F.3d 406, 411 (7th Cir. 2002) ("Our only explanation is that the unique nature of [the compensatory bias claim] may be why we need to look for actual bias"); *id.* at 421 (noting that in *Bracy*, this "Court [did] not regard the temptation to engage in compensatory bias as falling into the per se category, where proof of the temptation is enough to entitle a defendant to a new trial because the likelihood that the judge succumbed (perhaps quite unconsciously) is great") (Posner, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part, joined by Manion and Easterbrook, J.J.).

precedents apply an objective standard that, in the usual case, avoids having to determine whether actual bias is present." *Williams v. Pennsylvania*, 136 S. Ct. 1899, 1905 (2016). The critical inquiry is whether "as an objective matter, 'the average judge in his position is 'likely' to be neutral, or whether there is an unconstitutional 'potential for bias.'" *Id.* (citing *Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal Co.*, 556 U.S. 868, 881 (2009)). The circumstances presented in the instant case of a judge being criminally investigated by one of the parties is precisely the type of situation where an objective inquiry requires the court's recusal due to an appearance of impropriety. *Cf. In Interest of McFall*, 617 A.2d 707, 713-14 (Pa. 1992) (disqualification required when judge "faced potential prosecution by the same authorities that prosecuted defendants in her courtroom every day"). Such a situation is just as likely to compromise a judge's impartiality as the situation where the court stands to financially benefit from the case. *See, e.g., Tumey v. Ohio*, 273 U.S. 510, 532 (1927). In fact, the average jurist may be even more affected by a threat to his or her life, liberty, and career than they would be to a mere financial benefit. *See McFall*, 617 A.2d at 712.[9]

The Nevada Supreme Court has recognized that a judge cannot be criminally investigated by one of the parties to a case in the context of state conflict of interest law when it held that a sitting judge cannot be supervised on disciplinary probation by the state attorney general's office while deputies of the office appear before the judge:

> This supervision is going on while the Attorney General's staff is presumably still trying cases before the supervised judge. [citation] This is a clear conflict of interest. Obviously, the Attorney General or the district attorneys over whom she has supervisory control, appear in an

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[9] There is no question that a juror who is being criminally prosecuted by one of the parties to a case is biased as a matter of law. *See, e.g., Brooks v. Dretke*, 418 F.3d 430, 434-35 (5th Cir. 2005).

> adversarial setting before the very judges she is investigating or is supervising under 'probation.'

Whitehead v. Nevada Comm'n on Judicial Discipline, 878 P.2d 913, 920-21 (Nev. 1994). "It is not difficult to see how the independence of judges might be compromised if a judge before whom a deputy attorney general was appearing felt threatened by the Attorney General's possession of confidential information, whether true or not, that might be harmful to the judge if released to the public." *Id.* at 919. Such circumstances are also fundamentally unfair to opposing parties litigating cases against deputies of the attorney general's office who are "prosecuting criminal and civil cases before judges who are under investigation and prosecution by the Attorney General in Commission proceedings, and [where there is] the potential for holding such judges actual or imagined 'hostages' without any awareness by opposing counsel." *Id.* at 916.

Moreover, a judge cannot maintain a constitutional level of impartiality in a case when he or she has a relationship with a state witness that is directly connected to a pending criminal investigation against the judge. *Cf. Johnson v. Mississippi*, 403 U.S. 212, 215-16 (1971) (recusal required where judge became "so enmeshed in matters involving [the defendant] as to make it appropriate for another judge to sit"). In the circumstances presented here, the average jurist would hesitate to disclose a relationship with the state's victim witness when a material part of the relationship between the witness and the judge was that the judge fixed a case for him. The fact that the judge falsely stated on the record that he did not know whether Metro was involved in the investigation, and the fact that he acquiesced in, and did not correct, the prosecutor's false representations regarding the extent of the Clark County District Attorney's Office's involvement in the federal investigation, is strong evidence that the judge was in fact affected by the State's involvement. *Cf. McFall*,

617 A.2d at 711 (recognizing that it is "a denial of the appellees' right to a fair and impartial tribunal for a judge to preside over their cases without revealing circumstances that raise questions as to her impartiality"). By denying this part of Rippo's claim on law-of-the-case grounds, the Nevada Supreme Court clearly ignored the import of his evidentiary proffer and therefore mischaracterized the species of judicial bias that exists in this case.

In such circumstances, the Nevada Supreme Court erred by holding that Rippo had to proffer more particularized evidence of the trial judge's actual bias in his case. "The issue is whether the judge was biased, regardless of how his bias may have manifested itself, or failed to manifest itself, in any defendant's case." *Cartalino v. Washington*, 122 F.3d 8, 10 (7th Cir. 1997). This Court required no such particularized proof of actual bias in *Tumey* as judicial bias constitutes structural error, *Tumey*, 273 U.S. at 535, and the state court erred by requiring more of Rippo in this case. As this Court has long recognized, "to perform its high function in the best way 'justice must satisfy the appearance of justice.'" *In re Murchison*, 349 U.S. 133, 136 (1955) (citation omitted).

The totality of the circumstances here show that Rippo is entitled to relief from his convictions and death sentences based on the present record. While each of the circumstances above independently required the judge's recusal, in combination they absolutely demand it. However, this case comes before the Court in a procedural posture where Rippo has not received any factual development on his claim from the time of trial up to the present. Therefore, at the very least, his case should be remanded with instructions to permit formal discovery and factual development so that a decision can be rendered based on a fully developed record. *See, e.g., Bracy*, 520 U.S. at 908-10. Factual development is appropriate here because "the presumption [of impartiality] has been soundly rebutted." *Id.* at 909.

In the alternative, there is a reasonable probability that a GVR of this case to the Nevada Supreme Court in light of *Williams* will result in a remand to the trial court to create a fully developed record just as it did when this Court GVR'd *Wellons* to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals. Such an approach will preserve this Court's scarce resources while also ensuring that Rippo receives a full and fair hearing on the extreme and unusual circumstances that are present in this case.

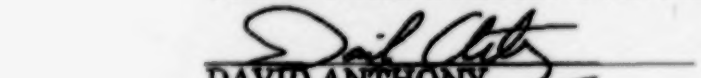
CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Rippo respectfully requests that this Court grant his petition for writ of certiorari and reverse the judgment of the Nevada Supreme Court. In the alternative, Rippo requests that this Court grant certiorari, vacate the decision of the Nevada Supreme Court, and remand for further proceedings in light of *Williams v. Pennsylvania*, 136 S. Ct. 1899 (2016).

DATED this 3rd day of October 2016.

Respectfully submitted,

Rene Valladares
Federal Public Defender of Nevada



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No. 16-6316

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

November 2, 2016

MICHAEL DAMON RIPPO, *Petitioner,*

v.

THE STATE OF NEVADA, *Respondent*

ON PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEVADA

RESPONDENT'S BRIEF IN OPPOSITION

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QUESTION PRESENTED

CAPITAL CASE

1. Whether a procedurally defaulted state habeas claim of judicial bias presents a federal question.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES iii

STATEMENT OF THE CASE 1

REASONS FOR DENYING THE PETITION 2

I. APPLICATION OF STATE HABEAS PROCEDURAL BARS CONSTITUTES AN ADEQUATE AND INDEPENDENT STATE GROUND 2

NO FEDERAL QUESTION WAS DECIDED BELOW 4

CONCLUSION 13

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Page Number:

Cases

Bailey v. Nagle,
172 F.3d 1299, 1304 (11th Cir. 1999) 9

Bracy v. Gramley,
520 U.S. 899, 117 S.Ct. 1793 (1997) 12

Coleman v. Thompson,
501 U.S. 722, 729, 111 S.Ct. 2546 (1991) 2, 8

Cone v. Bell,
556 U.S. 449, 466-67, 129 S.Ct. 1769, 1781 (2009) 10

Foster v. Chatman,
___ U.S. ___, 136 S. Ct. 1737 (2016) 7

Hathaway v. State,
119 Nev. 248, 252-53, 71 P.3d 503, 506-07 (2003) 3

Herb v. Pitcairn,
324 U.S. 117, 125-26, 65 S.Ct. 459, 463 (1945) 5, 9

Hogan v. Warden,
109 Nev. 952, 960, 860 P.2d 710, 716 (1993) 4

Leathe v. Thomas,
207 U.S. 93, 98, 28 S.Ct. 30, 31 (1908) 5

Lee v. Kemna,
534 U.S. 362, 375, 122 S.Ct. 877 (2002) 2

McGoldrick v. Compagnie Generale Transatlantique,
309 U.S. 430, 434 (1940) 13

Mu'Min v. Virginia,
500 U.S. 415, 422, 111 S.Ct. 1899, 1903 (1991) 4

Pellegrini v. State,
117 Nev. 860, 869-70, 34 P.3d 519, 525-26 (2001) 3

Pennsylvania v. Finley,
481 U.S. 551, 107 S. Ct. 1990 (1987) 8

Rippo v. Nevada,
525 U.S. 841, 119 S. Ct. 104 (1998) 5

Rippo v. State,
113 Nev. 1239, 946 P.2d 1017 (1997) 1

Rippo v. State,
122 Nev. 1086, 146 P.3d 279 (2006) 1

Rippo v. State,
132 Nev. ___, 368 P.3d 729 (2016) 2

Sochor v. Florida,
504 U.S. 527, 534 n.*, 112 S.Ct. 2114, 2120, n.* (1992) 9

Wellons v. Hall,
558 U.S. 220, 130 S. Ct. 727 (2010) 10, 11

Williams v. Pennsylvania,
___ U.S. ___, 136 S.Ct. 1899 (2016) 11, 12

Statutes

NRS 34.726 ..... 3, 10
NRS 34.726(1) 4, 7
NRS 34.810(1)(b) 10
NRS 34.810(2) 3, 6, 8, 10
NRS 34.810(3) 3, 4

No. 16-6316

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

November 2, 2016

MICHAEL DAMON RIPPO, *Petitioner,*

v.

THE STATE OF NEVADA, *Respondent*

ON PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEVADA

RESPONDENT'S BRIEF IN OPPOSITION

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

After a jury trial in 1996, Rippo was convicted of two counts of First Degree Murder and was sentenced to death for choking and killing two women. Rippo v. State, 113 Nev. 1239, 946 P.2d 1017 (1997) . The Nevada Supreme Court affirmed on direct appeal and issued Remittitur on November 3, 1998. Id. Rippo filed a timely first state habeas petition on December 4, 1998, and post-conviction counsel was appointed. After supplemental briefing and an evidentiary hearing, the petition was denied with written findings filed on December 1, 2004. The Nevada Supreme Court again affirmed on appeal and Remittitur issued on January 19, 2007. Rippo v. State, 122 Nev. 1086, 146 P.3d 279 (2006). After pursuing federal habeas, Rippo returned to state court to exhaust claims by filing a successive state habeas petition

on January 15, 2008. The claims were all procedurally defaulted and written findings dismissing the petition were filed on March 11, 2009. The Nevada Supreme Court affirmed in a published opinion finding that Rippo had failed to show good cause and actual prejudice or actual innocence sufficient to overcome the procedural default under state law. Rippo v. State, 132 Nev. ___, 368 P.3d 729 (2016). Rippo now petitions this Court for certiorari.

REASONS FOR DENYING THE PETITION

I.
APPLICATION OF STATE HABEAS PROCEDURAL BARS CONSTITUTES AN ADEQUATE AND INDEPENDENT STATE GROUND

Application of state procedural bars is an adequate and independent state ground which will bar this Court's review of the judicial bias claim. As set forth in the Statement of the Case section above, Rippo is seeking certiorari review not of a direct appeal from a state conviction, but from the Nevada Supreme Court's affirmance of the denial of his untimely and successive state post-conviction petition which was procedurally barred under state law. It is well established that the Supreme Court will not review a question of federal law decided by a state court if the decision of that court rests on a state law ground that is independent of the federal question and adequate to support the judgment. Coleman v. Thompson, 501 U.S. 722, 729, 111 S.Ct. 2546 (1991); Lee v. Kemna, 534 U.S. 362, 375, 122 S.Ct. 877 (2002). This rule applies whether the state law ground is substantive or procedural. Id. The adequate state ground doctrine applies to bar federal review when the state

court declines to address an inmate's federal claims because the inmate had failed to meet state procedural requirements. Id.

In Nevada, "unless there is good cause shown for delay, a petition that challenges the validity of a judgment or sentence must be filed within one year after entry of the judgment of conviction or, if an appeal has been taken from the judgment, within one year after the supreme court issues its remittitur." NRS 34.726; see also Pellegrini v. State, 117 Nev. 860, 869-70, 34 P.3d 519, 525-26 (2001) (holding that the time bar in NRS 34.726 applies to successive petitions); see generally Hathaway v. State, 119 Nev. 248, 252-53, 71 P.3d 503, 506-07 (2003) (stating that a claim reasonably available to the petitioner during the statutory time period did not constitute good cause to excuse a delay in filing).

A second or successive petition must be dismissed if the judge or justice determines that it fails to allege new or different grounds for relief and that the prior determination was on the merits or, if new and different grounds are alleged, the judge or justice finds that the failure of the Petitioner to assert those grounds in a prior petition constituted an abuse of the writ. NRS 34.810(2). The Petitioner has the burden of pleading and proving specific facts that demonstrate good cause for the petitioner's failure to present the claim or for presenting the claim again and actual prejudice to the petitioner. NRS 34.810(3). Even if Rippo could establish good cause, he must also demonstrate actual prejudice, which requires a showing,

"not merely that the errors created a possibility of prejudice, but that they worked to [the petitioner's] actual and substantial disadvantage, in affecting the [trial] with error of constitutional dimensions." See NRS 34.726(1); NRS 34.810(3); Hogan v. Warden, 109 Nev. 952, 960, 860 P.2d 710, 716 (1993).

Although Rippo attempts to frame a constitutional issue for this Court's review, the Nevada Supreme Court did not actually reach the merits of any federal question and instead affirmed dismissal of Rippo's untimely and successive petition based on state procedural grounds:

> [W]e conclude that although Rippo filed his petition within a reasonable time after the postconviction-counsel claims became available, those claims lack merit and therefore he has not demonstrated good cause for an untimely petition or good cause and prejudice for a second petition. We also reject his other allegations of good cause and prejudice. The district court properly denied the petition as procedurally barred. We therefore affirm.

Rippo v. State, 368 P.3d at 734. Accordingly, the Nevada Supreme Court's decision rests squarely upon the application of state procedural bars which are independent of any federal question and adequate to support the judgment.

NO FEDERAL QUESTION WAS DECIDED BELOW

It is essential to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court under § 1257(a) that a substantial federal question has been properly raised and decided in the state court proceedings. Mu'Min v. Virginia, 500 U.S. 415, 422, 111 S.Ct. 1899, 1903 (1991) (holding that the Court's appellate jurisdiction under § 1257(a) is limited "to

enforcing the commands of the United States Constitution"); Leathe v. Thomas, 207 U.S. 93, 98, 28 S.Ct. 30, 31 (1908) ("[I]n a case coming from a state court this court can consider only Federal questions, and . . . it cannot entertain the case unless the decision was against the plaintiff in error upon those questions."). Consequently this Court's appellate jurisdiction over state court decisions is limited to "correct[ing] them to the extent that they incorrectly adjudge federal rights." Herb v. Pitcairn, 324 U.S. 117, 125-26, 65 S.Ct. 459, 463 (1945). Where federal law is not binding, and thus the state court could render the same judgment on remand even after this Court "corrected its views of federal laws," this Court's review would amount to nothing more than an advisory opinion. Id.

Rippo argues that certiorari is necessary to review his claim of a federal Due Process violation arising from judicial bias of the trial judge at his capital jury trial 20 years ago. This claim was in fact raised on direct appeal in 1997 and was denied on the merits by the Nevada Supreme Court. Rippo v. State, 113 Nev. 1239, 1248-50, 946 P.2d 1017, 1023-24 (1997). At that time, this Court declined to review the judicial bias issue on the merits when it denied certiorari. Rippo v. Nevada, 525 U.S. 841, 119 S. Ct. 104 (1998). Significantly, the judicial bias claim was not re-asserted in the first state postconviction proceedings even though new information had come to light. See e.g., Rippo v. State, 122 Nev. 1086, 146 P.3d 279 (2006); Rippo v. State, 368 P.3d at 745 ("The new information is based on documents filed

in connection with and testimony at the federal trials in 1997 and 1998, after Rippo's trial.").[1] Not until a decade later in 2008 did federal counsel raise this "new" evidence in a successive state exhaustion petition. Now, this judicial bias claim comes again before the Court not on the merits, but in the context of a successive and procedurally barred state habeas petition for which no good cause was shown.

The recent decision of the Nevada Supreme Court did not actually reach the merits of any federal question but instead affirmed dismissal of the judicial bias claim based on state procedural grounds:

> Rippo also has not demonstrated good cause and actual prejudice to excuse his failure to re-raise the judicial-bias claim in the first habeas petition. . . . Therefore, the postconviction-counsel claim lacks merit and is not adequate cause to excuse the procedural default of the judicial-bias claim under NRS 34.810(2).

Rippo v. State, 368 P.3d at 745. In other words, under state law the Nevada Supreme Court could not reconsider the judicial bias claim on the merits in a second habeas petition unless Rippo first showed good cause for first postconviction counsel's failure to re-raise the claim in that proceeding. Under Nevada law, ineffective assistance of postconviction counsel may excuse a procedural default for failing to raise a claim in a prior habeas proceeding, but only if the ineffective assistance of postconviction counsel claim itself is not procedurally barred. Id. at 737.

---

[1] Rippo's trial judge was ultimately acquitted of all charges in his federal corruption case.

Rippo relies upon Foster v. Chatman where this Court found it had jurisdiction to grant certiorari on a claim of a Batson violation occurring at trial that had been renewed in state habeas and denied based on res judicata. Foster v. Chatman, ___ U.S. ___, 136 S. Ct. 1737 (2016). Significantly, the Georgia Supreme Court's order declining the appeal provided no reasoning for its decision, which left open the question of whether the order rested on an adequate and independent state law ground so as to preclude jurisdiction. Id. This Court found it was apparent that the state habeas court's application of res judicata to Foster's Batson claim, consisting of four pages of federal Batson analysis on the merits, was not independent of the merits of his federal constitutional challenge, and therefore posed no impediment to review. Id. Ultimately, the state habeas court had concluded that Foster's "renewed Batson claim is without merit." Id.

No such ruling on the merits of the renewed judicial bias claim occurred in the present case. Unlike the Georgia Supreme Court in Foster, the Nevada Supreme Court articulated multiple state law procedural rules as the basis for the habeas court's decision:

> Rippo acknowledged that the petition was not filed within the time period provided by NRS 34.726(1) and that most of the grounds in the petition were either waived, successive, or an abuse of the writ and therefore subject to various procedural defaults under NRS 34.810. He provided several explanations for his failure to file the petition within the time provided by NRS 34.726(1) and for failing to raise the new claims in prior proceedings or raising the claims again. The district

> court dismissed the petition as procedurally defaulted, specifically mentioning NRS 34.716 and NRS 34.810(2).

Rippo, 368 P.3d at 735. Instead, the only claim reviewed "on the merits" was the claim of ineffective assistance of postconviction counsel which Rippo had offered as good cause to overcome the procedural default for his untimely and successive petition. Notably, there is no recognized federal constitutional right to effective assistance of state postconviction counsel. Coleman v. Thompson, 501 U.S. 722, 111 S. Ct. 2546 (1991); Pennsylvania v. Finley, 481 U.S. 551, 107 S. Ct. 1990 (1987). Such a claim is purely a matter of state law. Nevada is not even obligated to apply Strickland analysis in its review of a claim of good cause based on postconviction counsel's errors.

Rippo claims that the Nevada Supreme Court's finding that Rippo suffered no prejudice from first postconviction counsel's performance was based on its antecedent holding that the judicial bias claim was without merit. Even if it is true that the consideration of prejudice necessitated some review of the merits of the claim, lack of good cause or deficient performance remain unaffected and are an adequate basis alone to deny relief under state procedural bars. Prejudice by itself is insufficient as "both showings must be made . . . ." Rippo, 368 P.3d at 741. The Nevada Supreme Court's prejudice analysis depended upon a string of hypotheticals and antecedents which demonstrate the independent and adequate state law grounds Rippo would have had to overcome to have the judicial bias claim entertained again.

The Court held that in order for it to revisit the issue, Rippo would have had to establish good cause such as ineffective assistance of postconviction counsel based on deficient performance for failing to raise the judicial bias claim for a second time after it was denied on direct appeal and at the same time overcome Nevada's law of the case doctrine. But none of these conditions were met.

To the extent Nevada's discussion of the judicial bias claim in any way could be construed as a ruling on the merits, such is at most an alternative and unnecessary ruling in light of the primary holding of the case that Rippo had failed to establish good cause and deficient performance of first postconviction counsel to overcome the state procedural default. Sochor v. Florida, 504 U.S. 527, 534 n.*, 112 S.Ct. 2114, 2120, n.* (1992) (state supreme court made requisite "plain statement that petitioner's claim was procedurally barred" by stating that "claim was not preserved for appeal" and by citing case requiring preservation of claims, even though state court went on to reject merits "in the alternative"); Bailey v. Nagle, 172 F.3d 1299, 1304 (11th Cir. 1999) (although state court opinion "could have been more explicit" about its reasoning, ruling rested on procedural ground and analysis of merits was merely alternative ground for decision). Should this Court seek to correct any perceived federal holding in this case, it would amount to nothing more than an advisory opinion because the state judgment would remain that Rippo had failed to demonstrate good cause under state law. Herb v. Pitcairn, 324 U.S. 117, 125, 65

S.Ct. 459, 462-63 (1945). The merits of any judicial bias issue, even if constituting structural error, would still be procedurally defaulted under state law.

Similarly, Cone v. Bell is inapposite as it simply holds that a when a state court declines to review the merits of a petitioner's claim solely on the ground that it has done so already, it creates no bar to federal habeas review. Cone v. Bell, 556 U.S. 449, 466-67, 129 S.Ct. 1769, 1781 (2009); see also Wellons v. Hall, 558 U.S. 220, 130 S. Ct. 727 (2010). The Tennessee postconviction court had not invoked any kind of state procedural bar, but had simply declined to review again the same Brady claim that had been addressed on direct appeal. Id. "When a state court refuses to readjudicate a claim on the ground that it has been previously determined, the court's decision does not indicate that the claim has been procedurally defaulted." Cone v. Bell, 556 U.S. 449, 467 (2009). While Nevada relied in part on the law of the case doctrine to affirm the denial of Rippo's judicial bias claim, unlike Tennesee, Nevada also expressly denied relief based on three independent state procedural bars in NRS 34.726, NRS 34.810(1)(b), and NRS 34.810(2), any one of which alone would have been adequate.

Both Cone and Wellens arose from the denial of discovery and an evidentiary hearing in federal habeas proceedings, not state habeas proceedings. In Rippo's case, no federal habeas court has yet determined whether Rippo's judicial bias claim is barred from federal habeas review, and thus any claim under Cone and Wellens is

premature. It remains to be seen whether in federal habeas Rippo will be permitted the factual development of his claim which he procedurally defaulted in state court. Such issue is not ripe at this time.

In the alternative, Rippo seeks a remand for further state proceedings in light of this Court's recent decision in Williams v. Pennsylvania, ___ U.S. ___, 136 S.Ct. 1899 (2016). However, Williams is distinguished because it involved a claim of judicial bias in the immediate state court postconviction order under review, not a procedurally defaulted claim of judicial bias from trial. This Court in Williams did not need to concern itself with questions of jurisdiction and an adequate and independent state bar. Certiorari was granted because the former district attorney who had authorized seeking the death penalty against Williams, subsequently sat as an appellate judge in this same case and declined to recuse himself. Id. This Due Process violation occurred in the current postconviction order for which certiorari was sought. Rippo makes no such claim against the justices of the Nevada Supreme Court in affirming the denial of his procedurally barred habeas petition.

A GVR is appropriate when "intervening developments . . . reveal a reasonable probability that the decision below rests upon a premise that the lower court would reject if given the opportunity for further consideration, and where it appears that such a redetermination may determine the ultimate outcome" of the matter. Wellons v. Hall, 558 U.S. 220, 225, 130 S. Ct. 727, 731 (2010). The decision

in Williams to apply the Due Process clause to the situation of a former prosecutor acting as a judge in the same case, has no bearing on the question of judicial bias in Rippo's case. To the extent Williams announced a new rule of law, Rippo has failed to show that it has retroactive application to his final judgment on collateral review. Even if it does, Williams does not undermine the conclusion in Bracy that for a Due Process violation a petitioner must show actual judicial bias "in his own case." Bracy v. Gramley, 520 U.S. 899, 117 S.Ct. 1793 (1997). Rippo has no evidence that his trial judge was being criminally investigated by the prosecution during his trial. The district attorney's investigation began only after the federal Indictment against the trial judge was unsealed, about a month after the conclusion of Rippo's trial. None of this ultimately matters because irrespective of prejudice, Rippo was unable to show good cause for the delay and for re-raising the judicial bias issue in a successive state habeas petition.

It has become the settled practice of this Court that, in the exercise of its §1257(a) appellate jurisdiction over state courts, it will not consider federal questions not pressed or passed upon in the state courts. This requirement stems from "the appropriate relationship of this Court to state courts," a relationship of "peculiar force which should lead us to refrain from deciding questions not presented or decided in the highest court of the state whose judicial action we are called upon to review." McGoldrick v. Compagnie Generale Transatlantique, 309 U.S. 430, 434

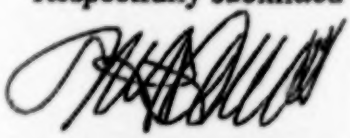
(1940). Because no federal question was fairly decided below as to judicial bias, this Court is without jurisdiction to entertain such in a petition for certiorari review.

CONCLUSION

In the Opinion at issue in this Petition, the Nevada Supreme Court did not rule upon the merits of any federal question regarding judicial bias. Such issue simply is not presented due to the procedural posture of this case. Rather, the Nevada Supreme Court found that Rippo's successive and untimely post-conviction petition was procedurally barred and Rippo had failed to establish a good cause explanation for his delay and failure to re-raise the claim in his previous first state post-conviction petition. No federal constitutional issue was involved at all in the application of state procedural bars which constitute an independent and adequate state ground barring federal review.

WHEREFORE, the State respectfully requests that certiorari be denied.

Respectfully submitted



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Counsel for Respondent

No. 16-6316

ORIGINAL

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

November 2, 2016

MICHAEL DAMON RIPPO, *Petitioner,*

v.

THE STATE OF NEVADA, *Respondent*

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SUPREME COURT, U.S.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Steven S. Owens, a member of the Bar of this Court, hereby certify that on November 2, 2016, one copy of Respondent's Brief in Opposition to Petition for the Writ of Certiorari in the above-entitled case was mailed, first class postage prepaid.

To: DAVID ANTHONY
Assistant Federal Public Defenders
411 E. Bonneville Ave., Ste. 250
Las Vegas, Nevada 89101
Counsel for Petitioner.

I further certify that all parties required to be served have been served.

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November 2, 2016

William K. Suter
Supreme Court of the United States
Office of the Clerk
1 First Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20543

RE: Michael Damon Rippo
v.
The State of Nevada
No. 16-6316

Dear Clerk:

We are enclosing the original and eleven copies of our Respondent's Brief in Opposition of Petition for Writ of Certiorari and the Original Certificate of Service in the above-captioned matter for filing in your office and consideration by the Court.

Very truly yours,

BY _____
STEVEN S. OWENS
Nevada Bar #004352
Chief Deputy District Attorney

SSO/ed

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No. 16-6316

OCTOBER TERM, 2016

In the Supreme Court of the United States

MICHAEL DAMON RIPPO,

Petitioner,

v.

TIMOTHY FILSON, Warden,

Respondent.

On Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the Nevada Supreme Court

Petitioner's Reply to Respondent's Brief in Opposition

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Table of Contents

REPLY TO OPPOSITION TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI 1
CONCLUSION 4

REPLY TO OPPOSITION TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

This is a capital case where the trial judge was being criminally investigated by the State and where the investigation concerned the judge's act of fixing cases for litigants, including for one of the State's witnesses who testified at Rippo's trial. The State's brief in opposition ("BIO") does not address the merits of Rippo's claim which reveals an extreme case of judicial bias. The State does however make factual assertions in passing that are being raised before this Court for the first time:

> Rippo has no evidence that his trial judge was being criminally investigated by the prosecution during his trial. The district attorney's investigation began only after the federal Indictment against the trial judge was unsealed, about a month after the conclusion of Rippo's trial.

BIO at 12. Counsel for the State's naked assertion that his office's investigation of the trial judge began only after Rippo's trial is inconsistent with his representations below that he had no personal knowledge of the facts of the State's investigation and had no intention of making himself aware of them. App. 555.

The State entirely fails to address its crucial role in the sting operation to bait the trial judge into taking bribes, the role of state law enforcement in the investigation, state law enforcement's participation in the execution of the search warrant on judge's home, and their interrogation of the judge. The State does not dispute that the trial judge was aware of all of these facts before the start of Rippo's trial, and that the judge knew which cases the State assisted the Chief Judge of the court in routing to the trial judge's department. App. 133. There can be no rational dispute that the average jurist in such a situation could not maintain a constitutional level of impartiality.

The State argues against a GVR in light of this Court's decision in *Williams v. Pennsylvania*, 136 S. Ct. 1899 (2016). However, its arguments only show why Rippo's case is more appropriate for plenary consideration than *Williams*. The State

distinguishes *Williams* "because it involved a claim of judicial bias in the immediate state court postconviction order under review, not a procedurally defaulted claim of judicial bias from trial." BIO at 11. The distinction the State identifies is one of the very reasons why Chief Justice Roberts dissented in *Williams*, i.e., because the alleged bias was unconnected to the petitioner's trial. *Williams*, 136 S. Ct. at 1913-14 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting). Here, the extreme and unusual facts showing the trial court was biased directly infect Rippo's convictions and death sentences. The distinction identified by the State shows, if anything, that Rippo's case presents an excellent vehicle for this Court's plenary consideration.

The State's primary argument is that the Nevada Supreme Court denied Rippo's judicial bias claim on independent and adequate state law grounds. The State acknowledges the state court's decision could have been based on federal constitutional grounds, but contends the constitutional ruling "is at most an alternative and unnecessary ruling in light of the primary holding of the case that Rippo had failed to establish good cause and deficient performance of first postconviction counsel to overcome the state procedural default." BIO at 9. "Even if it is true that the consideration of prejudice necessitated some review of the merits of the [federal] claim, lack of good cause or deficient performance remain unaffected and are an adequate basis alone to deny relief under the state procedural bars." *Id.* at 8.

The State's argument that there are alternative state grounds for the Nevada Supreme Court's decision that are independent of federal law constitutes a material mischaracterization of the decision. The State does not cite any part of the state court's ruling respecting Rippo's judicial bias claim that is based on "good cause or deficient performance" that is independent of federal law. The State cites to part of the Nevada Supreme Court's decision, but it conspicuously omits relevant language showing the decision is not independent of federal law, by hiding it within an ellipses to a block quote. BIO at 6. The relevant language not included in the State's block

quotation shows the Nevada Supreme Court's "good cause" ruling was predicated upon an antecedent ruling of federal law:

> Because this court had rejected the generic proposition that the trial judge had to be disqualified in all criminal cases while he was subject to the federal investigation, *Rippo*, 113 Nev. at 1248, 1249 & n.1, 946 P.2d at 1023 & n.1, and the new information still does not *establish judicial bias in this case*, Rippo has not demonstrated that the judicial-bias claim is 'one that any reasonably competent [habeas] counsel would have' reasserted or that the claim would have entitled him to relief, [citation]. Therefore, the post-conviction claim lacks merit and is not adequate cause to excuse the procedural default of the judicial-bias claim under NRS 34.810(2).

App. 34, *Rippo*, 368 P.3d at 745 (emphasis added). The Nevada Supreme Court's "good cause" ruling is based on the antecedent ruling that "the information still does not establish judicial bias in this case." *Id.* This is a federal constitutional ruling.

Rippo argued that the Nevada Supreme Court's procedural rulings were based entirely upon antecedent rulings of federal law. Petition at 20 n.6. The State acknowledges "the only claim reviewed 'on the merits' was the claim of ineffective assistance of postconviction counsel which Rippo offered as good cause to overcome the procedural default for his untimely and successive petition." BIO at 8. Rippo's arguments of ineffective assistance of first state post-conviction counsel allow him to overcome all of the procedural default rules cited by the State, see BIO at 7-8. "[W]here a petitioner [like Rippo] is entitled to the appointment of postconviction counsel pursuant to a statutory mandate, the ineffective assistance of that counsel may provide good cause for the filing of a second petition." App. 03, *Rippo*, 368 P.3d at 733. As explained above, the relevant parts of the Nevada Supreme Court's decision respecting Rippo's judicial bias claim, i.e., that he cannot show good cause based upon ineffective assistance of post-conviction counsel, is a decision based solely on antecedent federal constitutional grounds. *E.g.*, *Ake v. Oklahoma*, 470 U.S. 68,

74-75 (1985). There are no alternative grounds that are independent of federal law as the State argues.

The State does not dispute the fact that the Nevada Supreme Court's law of the case ruling is a decision on the merits of Rippo's judicial bias claim. The State acknowledges the Nevada Supreme Court "relied in part on the law of the case doctrine to affirm the denial of Rippo's judicial bias claim . . . ." BIO at 10. The State's only argument is that these cases are distinguishable because Rippo's case also concerns ineffective assistance of first state post-conviction counsel. *Id.* at 7-8. As explained above, that ruling was based on federal constitutional law.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Rippo respectfully requests that this Court grant his petition for certiorari and vacate the decision of the Nevada Supreme Court. In the alternative, he requests that this Court grant the petition, vacate the state court's decision, and remand for further consideration in light of *Williams v. Pennsylvania*, 136 S. Ct. 1899 (2016).

Respectfully submitted, this 15th day of November, 2016.

Respectfully submitted,

Rene Valladares
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November 15, 2016

Mr. Scott S. Harris, Clerk of the Court
United States Supreme Court
1 First Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20543

Re: *Michael Damon Rippo v. Timothy Filson*

Dear Mr. Harris:

I have enclosed for filing in the above-captioned case the original and eleven copies of the following Petitioner's Reply to Respondent's Brief in Opposition.

Please return one file-stamped copy of the enclosed Petitioner's Reply to Respondent's Brief in Opposition using the envelope provided herein for your convenience.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

David Anthony
Assistant Federal Public Defender

NOV 17 2016

Enclosures

No. 16-6316

OCTOBER TERM, 2016

In the Supreme Court of the United States

MICHAEL DAMON RIPPO, Petitioner,

v.

TIMOTHY FILSON, Warden, Respondent.

On Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the Nevada Supreme Court

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

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Attorneys for Petitioner
*Counsel of Record

I, David Anthony, an attorney who is authorized to file a Petitioner's Reply to Respondent's Brief in Opposition on behalf of Michael Damon Rippo hereby certify that on this 15th day of November, 2016, one copy of the Petitioner's Reply to Respondent's Brief in Opposition, in the above-entitled case were mailed, first class postage prepaid, to Adam Paul Laxalt, Attorney General of Nevada, 100 North Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada 89701, and Steve S. Owens, Deputy District Attorney, 200 East Lewis Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada 89101, counsel for the respondents herein. I further certify that all parties required to be served have been served.

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